



# **INAUGURAL FALL CONVOCATION ADDRESS**

Chancellor Ronald L. Elsenbaumer  
Purdue University Fort Wayne  
August 20, 2018

Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here today.

Jim Spaniolo, thank you so much for joining us. You have been a mentor, a colleague, and a tremendous role model. I am humbled and inspired by your depth of knowledge, your integrity, and your wisdom. Indeed, I learned so much from you over the nine years I had the privilege of working for you. And, for that, I am most grateful.

But most importantly, I am proud to call you a friend. And it means so much to me that you and Sue are here to share this inaugural convocation of Purdue University Fort Wayne.

And thank you, Purdue Trustee Gary Lehman, for being here with us today, and for your kind and encouraging words as well.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize and thank a few friends from Texas and South Carolina, who are here today to help us celebrate this wonderful event.

My wife Linda, Pam and Craig Taylor, Dan Casto, and Jim and Sue Spaniolo—all from Texas—and Torrey and Kathy Glass from South Carolina. Thank you for sharing this event with me.

And, of course, I want to welcome all of our students, faculty, staff, and friends. Thank you for being here. And a very special acknowledgement to all of our new students, faculty, and staff joining us this fall. Welcome to Purdue University Fort Wayne!

I also wish to congratulate our faculty members who have received promotions and tenure. We're very proud of all of you, as this represents an incredible milestone in your lives.

We are off to a fantastic start in this inaugural academic year as Purdue Fort Wayne.

Enrollment is up, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. We have more students living on campus than ever before. And we had our largest New Student Orientation in a very long time—1,900 students total. This room was filled to overflowing, with students having to go to the recital hall to participate.

Oh, and by the way, we have successfully completed a realignment process that has left absolutely no stone unturned and no process or system unchanged for the better.

I have been here at Purdue Fort Wayne for 10 months now, and I have learned a great deal during a very significant period in the university's development.

As an institution, we have just been through an historic transformation. And while the realignment is behind us, the transformation of this institution continues.

Today, we celebrate the beginning of a new legacy that we will build together.

During the past several months, we have changed our name. We have a new university logo that has national and international recognition. We have proudly adopted the Purdue University colors and identity. We have rebranded our Mastodons athletics program with gold and black and a little bit of blue to honor our legacy. We have new signage and banners everywhere, and more to come. We have a new website. And we have a new spirit mark that will be a symbol of campus pride.

As we have worked through these changes, we have had some very important conversations and have explored the very essence of our institution as part of our extensive rebranding process. We have achieved more clarity in who we are and how we want to convey that to our expanding world of influence.

We have dedicated ourselves to a singular idea—“Empowering Every Student, Every Day.” And you’re now seeing that commitment expressed in Fort Wayne, across Indiana, and beyond as “Education with Purpose.” It is being infused into our recruitment materials, on billboards, at airports, in print, and in social media. And it’s capturing people’s attention.

But, make no mistake about it, this realignment and this transition have been difficult for many. I understand that. Some thought it spelled the end of a significant part of our academic world. But, really, we all knew better. So many people on this campus and in the community have worked hard to ensure that we emerged stronger and more vibrant than ever before!

And, indeed, there is already much evidence of that, as we have seen across campus, in the community, and in the headlines.

However, some new challenges have emerged.

As a matter of fact, a recent newspaper headline proclaimed:

***Purdue Fort Wayne Hoping to Find Fix for Student Housing Havoc***

Now, when the word “havoc” turns up that prominently on the front page, above the fold, it tends to get your attention. It certainly sent a ripple among some of our staff.

But, you know, it got me thinking. And then it hit me that “havoc” was being used to describe a really great problem that any university would want to have—campus student housing that is fully occupied!

So, maybe what we need now is a little more havoc here at Purdue Fort Wayne. There is enormous opportunity that exists in creating some disruption, challenging the status quo, and breaking down institutionalized barriers to success.

We don't have to look far for examples. Amazon disrupted shopping and retail. Uber disrupted the taxi industry. Netflix disrupted the cable TV industry.

Regardless of what we've called it, creating and managing havoc is exactly what we have been doing together here during the past 10 months.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to create a little more havoc, in a good way. And I need your help.

Let's create havoc by recruiting more and more undergraduate students—not just from Indiana, but across the Midwest and beyond. For the first time in many years, our enrollment numbers are up this fall. Total credit hours are up 1.6 percent, and graduate credit hours are up 9.5 percent. We will have final numbers by the end of the week.

We accomplished this by working as a team to rethink how we engage and enroll prospective students. We created a war room of sorts—meeting weekly to develop strategy and implement tactics. And it's working.

I would like to recognize the individuals and their teams who worked so hard to make this happen. Carl recognized them earlier. A big thank you to all.

Let's create havoc by hiring more faculty who are at the top of their field. If students are the heart of the university, then our faculty members are the soul of this institution. We are now actively working to fill 19 faculty positions this year, and we will be pursuing another 15 new faculty positions next year with the Indiana Legislature—with Purdue President Mitch Daniels effectively leading the charge.

Likewise, we will value and nourish our current faculty by creating a supportive intellectual environment where they can teach and mentor students, pursue their research and scholarly activity, and engage in meaningful service to the community.

Let's also create havoc by significantly expanding our graduate programs. Having robust graduate programs helps enhance the intellectual life of the university, helps advance our research enterprise, helps create beneficial connections with business and industry, and helps us educate and train the next generation of faculty members.

We will also actively step up our recruitment of international students and give them every reason to choose Purdue Fort Wayne. We will provide a welcoming environment, and we will offer the programs and infrastructure they seek. Make no mistake—a college degree from a respected American university continues to be one of this nation's most sought-after commodities.

Let's create havoc by positioning the institution as a national university—while delivering squarely on every aspect of our mission. Purdue Fort Wayne is this region's flagship public university. We fulfill a need and occupy a realm that no other institution can achieve. We contribute in significant ways to economic development and regional impact. It's up to us to define what that means and where it can take us.

We will create new academic programs and ensure that all of our programs are of the highest quality. This year alone, we created three new schools—the School of Education, the School of Music, and the School of Polytechnic.

Last Monday, for instance, we opened the new Purdue Fort Wayne Sweetwater Music Center out at the Sweetwater corporate campus. The first class of students is benefiting from that fantastic new facility, beginning today. We will continue to create novel public-private partnerships—such as that one—that are in the best interests of our students.

Let's create havoc by providing a campus experience for our students that is second to none. We will provide the services, amenities, and support that students need and demand, and we will continue to develop an environment that is welcoming, stimulating, and sustaining. We will give our students every reason to be proud to be a student at Purdue Fort Wayne. And we will give them bragging rights with their friends that may be attending some of those other universities.

We are already taking a deep dive into how we provide career development services that serve both our students and the employers in the region. We have been working on this all summer, and about a week ago, we conducted a day-long design session that included about 40 of our faculty, staff, students, and community members who are involved in multiple aspects of career services. During the coming months, our new approach will take shape and come to life. This will be transformational for our students and will address a critical need for a highly educated work force that is in high demand.

Let's create havoc by engaging in campus-wide strategic planning that will help us develop our roadmap to success. A comprehensive strategic plan will guide every aspect of how we move forward as Purdue Fort Wayne—from academic planning to budgeting to philanthropy to capital expansion. With a clarity of mission and purpose, this institution will become a force to be reckoned with. And we will be launching that process early this fall.

Let's create havoc by valuing our faculty and staff and by compensating them for work well done. I realize the past few years have been challenging. At an institution so heavily dependent on tuition revenue, declining enrollment affects every aspect of the organization. Therefore, I am very pleased to announce today that, having met and exceeded our

enrollment projections, we will be in a position to offer a merit program for eligible faculty and staff late this fall. Stay tuned. More details will be provided in the coming weeks.

Let's create havoc by leveraging the prestigious Purdue University brand to advance our institution and add luster to all that we do. Purdue is a well-recognized and respected name—an amazing calling card—that has now gone truly international with the launch of Purdue Global.

We will leverage being a significant part of that constellation of entrepreneurial Purdue institutions, while retaining all of the elements that make Purdue Fort Wayne unique.

And yes, let's create havoc by keeping our student housing running at full capacity—and then some. As we attract more and more students from Indiana, the Midwest, nationally, and internationally, the demand will only increase. And we will need to build even more housing as word spreads that our campus is such a wonderful place to call home.

Colleagues, students, and friends, if this is havoc, then I say, let's bring it on.

Let's work together to create the Purdue University Fort Wayne that is uniquely ours. A university that has found a path to its destiny. A university that is defined and bolstered by its enormous potential. A university whose future is very bright.

Let's envision it. Let's build it. Let's own it. Together.

It will be messy at times. But I think we have proven we're up to the task. We've just been through a realignment—a very successful realignment—that has challenged us to be creative and resourceful in ways few could have imagined. And we have emerged stronger than ever.

We are bold. We are relentless. We are ready. We are Purdue University Fort Wayne.

Let's roll up our sleeves. Let's get to work. And let's create more havoc!

Thank you. And Go Dons!

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